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This Thing --Goodwill

By Rabbi Martin Zielonka

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"The Jew and Christianity"
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Temple Mt. Sinai
El Paso, Texas

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Goodwill between Jew and Christian is a topic of increasing interest. The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America has a special committee with a paid secretary to encourage efforts for a closer fellowship between the followers of these great religious forces in American life. Various Jewish organizations of national scope accepted this proffer and are seconding the efforts wherever they maybe made. Fellowship banquets have been held in some of our larger communities and here and there an exchange of pulpits has been arranged, while one community has gone further than this, the Jewish congregation as a congregation was the guest of the Christian denomination where the rabbi delivered the message, and the Christian congregation in turn was the guest of the synagogue, where the pastor delivered the message.

The basic reason for this movement is the definite decision by certain groups within the Christian church that its attitude toward the Jew has not been fair. Since both groups must live side by side in the American environment and since the traditions of each group differ so essentially from the traditions of the other, the best way to accomplish results is by approaching each other in a friendly spirit and seeking to ascertain the best. The attitude of the church has been one of superiority. The Jew represented a covenant that had been superceded by a newer covenant which was called the New Testament and it was the duty of the

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adherents of this newer dispensation to draw unto itself all those that were without the fold. This led to Missionary efforts, which belittled the beauties and sanctities of the Old Testament in order that the New Ones might reflect an added splendor. Now the representatives of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ of America has renounced all missionary efforts and has denounced this policy because it did not bring fellowship but engendered animosities and suspicions.

Herbert Danby, residentiary Canon of St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem has presented to us "some phases Ancient and Modern of the Jewish attitude toward Christianity." Professor Harris Franklin Roll of the Garrett Biblical Institute of Chicago and Professor Samuel S. Cohon of the Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati, present the series of lectures upon their own religious denomination which they presented to the students of the school where they went as visiting lecturers.

The fact that a Jewish professor of theology delivered a series of lectures on Judaism to Christian theological students, while the Christian professor of theology presented his views to candidates for the rabbiniccal degree shows how far this spirit of good-will has worked and is working in the American environment.

If we agree to the American doctrine of "salvation by education" then we must go a step further and say that this exchange of lectures is a splendid investment, for it presents to the church and synagogue leaders of tomorrow the motifs of the two groups as expounded by leaders in their respective fields of thought.

Dr. Roll and Rabi Cohon present their religions and the motive power behind each, in the simplest language; neither apologizes for his beliefs; neither seeks to discredit the other, but each presents his viewpoint as a man steeped in his traditions and proud of these traditions. Each recognizes the rights to differ upon fundamentals and the historic back-

ground that has produced these fundamentals. Thus, without any desire to seek converts, the facts are presented; the student permitted to draw his own conclusions. When these young men go out into the world they will have a finer appreciation of the good in the faith of the other. By such means much more true good will can be created than by a great number of fellowship banquets where happy phrases are exchanged and where the speakers as well as the listeners immediately return to their regular walks of life.

Especially is this true from the Jewish viewpoint. Too many of these goodwill meetings have been held in Jewish homes of worship and under Jewish auspices or leadership. While some Jews may need these gatherings and may be influenced by the same, the average Jew does not need the same. As a member of a small minority group he has at all times, extended the hand of fellowship. He has not sought converts from other faiths, he has not proclaimed his interpretation of religion as essential to salvation. He has asked nothing more than the right to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience and that this right to worship be assured him at all times.

Here and there such gatherings have been held under Christian auspices and without any taint of patronage and where this has been done it has been of tremendous value. But it has not been done often enough! The Jew has no quarrel with the Christian, be he Modernist or Fundamentalist; he appreciates the peace that comes when they dwell in peace and harmony and when this good feeling overflows to those who are not of the Christian persuasion. If the Good Will movement is to reflect a growing approachment between Jew and Christian then the initiative for such meetings should find expression in the Christian church and the message of the Jewish teacher should find a sympathetic hearing in Christian pulpits and among Christian groups. The trouble is that the Jew

does not know the Christian, but the greater trouble is that the Christian knows the Jew still less. He is motivated by ancient fables and folk lore; his pet Jew is a splendid citizen but the Jew, as a Jew, does not measure up to the standards of his own group.

Just how true and how unjust such an estimate is, has been presented to us by Dr. Danby. He tells us—"The results of this search are, on the whole, far from flattering to us Christians. They are more humiliating when we think of what is most probably their real basis—our own failure to show forth Christ to the world in our own lives; because we, Christ's soldiers and servants, have so far forgotten our professions and betrayed our trust as to put our Lord and Master to open shame." And he furthermore states "We are more concerned with the Church's complete failure to show, whenever it was faced by the Jewish race, the faintest gleam of Christian feeling or the least glow of the spirit of Jesus. Where Jesus Himself and St. Stephen forgave, the church thought it right to avenge. In vain had St. Paul urged that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

These are the words of a Christian leader concerning Christianity's guilt in this matter of a lack of understanding and goodwill between these two great religions. No Jew could pen a more drastic accusation as to conditions that have existed and still exist to a great extent. "The miserable fact emerges that it was always the staunchest fighters for Christendom who were the bitterest persecutors."

Now Good Will cannot be built upon such a foundation. The change must come from the side of the persecutors and not from the side of the persecuted. "If the Jew did, in truth, become the deepest hater of Christianity, it was most certainly the Christian who had the largest share in manking him so," and then "if we would remove the reproach of the past then we must realize our fail-

ure as a Church to show forth the spirit of our blessed Lord and Saviour in just those places and times where it might have worked with greatest power".

An even where the Jew was persecuted he proved himself the better Christian: "We are met by the remarkable fact that there is no such thing as a recognizable Jewish Anti-Christian literature, that is to say, a literature in the least corresponding to the type presented by the gigantic bulk of Christian anti-Jewish literature." Be the reason what it may, history proves that the Jew has always been a poor hater; it was he that always turned the other cheek; it was he who welcomed every kindly overture that made his living more pleasant. Even during the period of the Crusades, "they disputed on philosophical grounds such Christian doctrines as the divinity of Christ and the Holy Trinity! yet they are without rancor and bitterness." "Jehuda ha-Levi hails Christianity as sharing the same root with Judaism and considers that it is one of the preparatory steps towards the time of Messianic bliss in which it, Christianitv will have a share." "Maimonides recognizes Christianity as fulfilling the divine purpose of preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah."

In more modern days—"Joseph Salvador, a French Jew of independent mind; Abraham Geiger, a leading figure of the Reform movement in Germany; Heinrich Graetz, a strong opponent of the Reform movement; Joseph Jacobs, an English Jew of the Westernized orthodox type; Mr. Claude Montefiore, an English Jew of the extreme Liberal camp and Achad Ha-Am, the philosopher of the Zionist movement" are presented as articulating Jewish Opinion about Christianity and all of them show appreciation for the fundamentals of Christianity and for the person of its founder. "The Jewish attitude has varied with almost mathematical certainty according to the precise degree in which

Christians have shown themselves real followers in spirit and deed of their Saviour."

Thus does the Christian teacher residing in Jerusalem and therefore in contact with all kinds and classes of Jews, indict the Christianity of the past and the present, for its atttitude towards the Jew. And in this indictment he suggests a solution that might well be taken as the slogan for any Good Will movement fostered by an organization such as the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America—"The more Christians have conformed to the spirit of Christ, the more has Jewish respect been drawn to Christianity and to Christ. The farther Christing after Jesus in spirit and in truth, ians have drawn back from follow- so have Christians brought into disrespect Christianity and Christ Himself." The underlying motive of this statement can be accepted by both parties to any Good Will movement—the spirit of gentleness, and forgiveness, the lack of ostentation and the power of persuasion are the surest methods of cooperation.

In every age the Jew has accepted his lot and sought to cultivate the friendship and fellowship of his neighbors, but too often was he segregated into a ghetto; too often was he hunted with a "Hep, Hep," too often was the terrible blood accusation revived and with it the attending misery and suffering; too often was he driven from the land after his goods were confiscated and too often was he enticed to seek promotions on condition that he be converted. And this has left an indelible impression upon his mind and upon his soul—an impression that cannot be wiped out in a single decade.

Conditions have not changed in many of the lands of Europe; conditions are much finer and better in these United States. And because they are finer here, and promise much, we ought not permit any group, organization, church or clan to interfere. We ought to foster this effort for Good Will; we ought

to respond to it with the best that is within us, but we must at the same time say, reverently but definitely that the initiative for such efforts should come from the majority side, because they are sure that we will accept them and because they cannot realize the scars that time has left upon our bodies.

We welcome such books as those of Roll and Cohon, and of Danby, they clear the atmosphere and prepare the way; we welcome the efforts of every organization that puts into action a definite program of Good Will, a program based upon mutual respect for each others attainments and mutual forgiveness of each others weakness. We stand ready to cooperate but we must ask the majority faith to lead the way for as Danby says—"So far as the Jews are concerned, let us not decieve ourselves for one moment; the church by its deliberate choice and conduct has made itself one gigantic and seemingly impenetrable obstacle." By the same deliberate choice and conduct it can now pave the way for real Good Will. Jew and Christian, Christian an' Jew must live together and work together in this land as well as many other lands. When suspicion will set aside by both sides and kindly deeds will take the place of whispering campaigns and open expression of thought be encouraged on both sides, then will we have attained the first step on the ladder of Good Will. And when we have made that step then will we find that it, like Jacob's ladder, has angels ascending and descending, carrying the message of our kindly deeds to the Eternal Father and bringing from Him a blessing forevermore. Such beeks as we have considered tonight will help prepare for that time.

—Amen.

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